NOAA FY 1999 Budget Request Fact Sheet

Restoring Our Coastal Resources

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is requesting a $3.0 million increase in FY 1999 for the Damage Assessment and Restoration Program (DARP). NOAA acts on behalf of the public as a trustee for coastal and marine resources. DARP's mandate is to ensure that coastal resources harmed by releases of oil and hazardous substances are restored as quickly as possible and that the public is compensated for the loss of natural resources from the time of injury until restoration is complete.

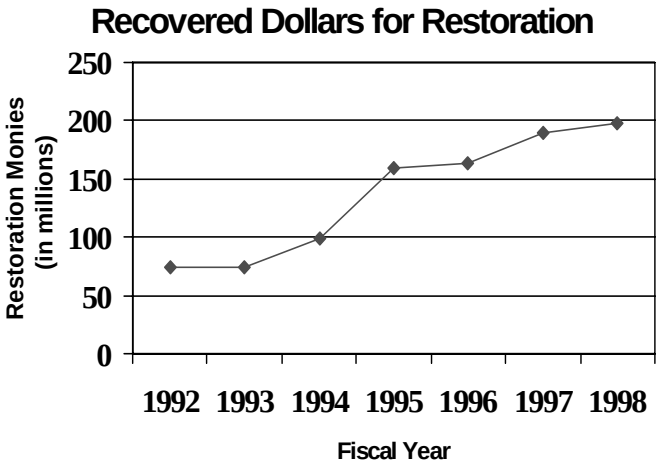
NOAA Budget NOAA Line Office/Activity	FY 1999 Program Change $ M
National Ocean Service	
Damage Assessment Program	1.5
National Marine Fisheries Service	
Habitat Conservation	1.5
Total	3.0

Injured Coastal Resources

Releases of oil and hazardous substances can have devastating effects on coastal resources. The degradation or loss of these important resources can produce significant adverse environmental and economic impacts. The significance of services provided by coastal ecosystems in terms of, for example, producing protein for human consumption, purifying water, and cycling nutrients, is staggering. Industries critical to the US economy, such as commercial and recreational fisheries and tourism, also rely heavily on coastal resources. Effective preservation of healthy coastal ecosystems requires that coastal resources injured by oil and hazardous material releases be restored as expeditiously as possible.

The tank barge Morris Berman spilled around 750,000 gallons of oil when it grounded on a reef near the entrance to San Juan harbor, Puerto Rico in January of 1994. The released oil impacted natural resources, as well as sand beaches and rocky shores that are heavily used by tourists.

DARP has a proven capability to restore injured coastal resources using funds recovered from the parties responsible for the pollution through the natural resource damage assessment process. Since 1990, DARP has recovered about $10 in restoration funding from responsible parties for every $1 of appropriated funds invested in the program, and has generated almost $200 million to restore injured coastal ecosystems.



Examples of successful restorations completed by DARP include:

- unprecedented coral reef restorations in the Florida Keys and Puerto Rico;
- lobster reef creation and shellfish restoration in Narragansett Bay;
- emergency mangrove and oyster reef restoration in Tampa Bay;
- salt marsh creation in coastal Louisiana;
- salmon habitat restoration in Elliott Bay, Commencement Bay and the Snake River system in Idaho; and
- permanent conservation of critical habitat in New York Harbor, Delaware Bay and New Bedford Harbor.

Since its inception in 1990, DARP has relied on a modest investment of base appropriations, supplemented with monies provided by responsible parties, to achieve these successes. However, these other sources of funding are inconsistent and often insufficient to maintain the stable base program required to address the existing number of damage assessment cases. This lack of funding has reduced the number of sites that NOAA can address at any given time and has constrained the program's ability to provide technical assistance to states and other trustees. It has also limited the development of better and more efficient assessment and restoration techniques for use by NOAA and other stakeholders in the damage assessment process. The result is a continuing loss of natural resources and the resulting impacts on sustainable fisheries, endangered species, critical habitats and the coastal ecosystem.

Restoring Our Coastal Resources

The President's FY 1999 Budget requests an increase of $1.5 million for damage assessment activities and $1.5 million for restoration planning. The request provides a stable base level of funding for DARP to continue efforts on existing cases. The request will allow DARP to maintain its leadership role and its capabilities to leverage the effectiveness of co-trustees by:

- Completing ongoing damage assessments, including commitments to assist other trustees (e.g., Calcasieu Estuary in Louisiana and Hudson River in New York);
- Pursuing new incidents of injury to coastal resources;
- Continuing to develop technical guidance on the natural resource damage assessment regulations under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990;
- Undertaking training efforts for other stakeholders to ensure more efficient and effective assessments and restoration;
- Developing improved methodologies for identifying and quantifying natural resource injury and restoration needs;
- Working with co-trustees and industry to develop regional restoration plans that address the cumulative impacts of smaller spills and releases and expedite restoration; and
- Providing for more public participation in restoration planning and decision making.

About NOAA and DARP

NOAA acts on behalf of the public as a trustee for coastal and marine natural resources under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 and the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. As the primary trustee for coastal and marine natural resources, NOAA is uniquely positioned to conduct damage assessments that will protect and restore these resources. To fulfill its mandate, NOAA's DARP maintains a multi-disciplinary core team of scientists, resource economists, and lawyers qualified to evaluate toxic releases; assess and quantify injuries; recover damages through negotiation or litigation; develop restoration alternatives; and evaluate the effectiveness of restoration projects. DARP's natural resource trustee efforts are essential to effective stewardship of the Nation's valuable coastal and marine resources and supports NOAA' environmental stewardship mission. This request is part of the President's Natural Disaster Reduction Initiative.

For Further Information Contact:
Richard Legatski
Office of Legislative Affairs
(202) 482-4981